13:Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1957
ER6 Rural Irish ER6

343 by hand. The corn-drying kiln is a culture-trait clearly adapted
251 to the climatic conditions of the Atlantic coasts of Europe. In extreme cases, as in the Faroe Islands—where even barley does not ripen fully—the ears are kiln-dried before thrashing, but the purpose of the Irish kilns was to harden the thrashed grain before grinding. They can be traced back archaeologically to the last centuries B.C. and on present evidence their introduction may be linked chronologically with grain-storage pits and with the rotary quern. Thus the custom of parching the grain in the straw would be a survival of an older culture layer associated with the saddle-quern and the mortar and possibly with harvesting by pulling the corn by the roots.

One early type of kiln was made of wattles plastered with clay, and was perhaps used like an oven, being heated before the corn was put in it to dry, but those which have come down into recent times were stone-lined pits into which a long flue was led. The fuel used was peat. It is stated that down to famine times every townland in some parts of the country had its kiln, though in other parts they went out of use long ago when landlords, following Anglo-Norman custom, insisted that all corn should be ground at the mill. In Co. Cavan for example, 'every estate has its cornmill and the tenantry is bound under severe penalty to grind their corn thereat and pay toll'.[1] These watermills should be distinguished from the native clackmills, [376] built over little streams and driven by small horizontal wheels. They were characteristically held in joint ownership, as were the kilns. The Mayo kiln is described as resembling a large tobacco pipe, the circular stone-lined bowl being dug into a sloping bank and the horizontal stem or flue emerging lower down the slope. A bee-hive cap of timber and thatch was the only part visible. In it a straw-covered wattled hatch gave access to the kiln floor, a wooden frame half-way down the bowl of the pipe, on which thrashed sheaves were spread, heads to centre. The grain, laid on this, took about twenty-four hours to dry. The taste of the oatmeal made from grain so dried was said to be delicious.[2] A man who had seen a similar kiln working in Co. Antrim told me that the corn was laid on a linen sheet

[1] C. Coote, *Cavan* (1802), 251.
[2] H. T. Knox, *P.R.I.A.*, 26 (1906–7), 265.

13:Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1957
ER6 Rural Irish ER6

come across surviving examples of these ancient devices. The iron 'cribs' associated with modern salmon weirs, however, appear to derive from wattled traps. And the long conical 'coghill' nets in which the eels are caught in the weirs of the Bann, the Shannon and (until recently) the Erne, are shaped like weels and indeed they are sometimes built up of a series of cones. The fine meshed 'tail' of the net is made to open and the eels, nowadays, are poured directly into submerged tanks. A detail suggestive of long custom is that the 'skiver' with which the tail is closed in the coghills of the weirs at Portna on the Bann consists of a perforated rib-bone of horse or cow. The pin is attached to a cord, which is wound round the end of the net and secured by thrusting the pin into the windings. The walls of the weirs are often still built of wattles, and the old style of weir on the Erne consists of a base of large stones into which the wattled superstructure is thrust.[1]

The wattles are known on the Bann as *skeaghs*: of the six weirs now fishing there four are of the traditional type and two have been modernized. At Athlone on the Shannon there were twenty-two eel weirs in the early seventeenth century, and nearly all were still working in the nineteenth century: a single weir is now fished there.[2] The eel weirs of the River Erne had been reduced to five when they were abandoned owing to the recent construction of a dam for the Ballyshannon hydro-electric scheme. The Bann silver eel fisheries are probably the largest of their kind in western Europe, and it is significant that the Bann is one of the richest rivers in Europe for archaeological discoveries ranging in date from the Mesolithic to the early medieval period. Both salmon and eels have now become money-crops and the catches are exported. Already in the eighteenth century Irish salt salmon was exported in considerable quantities to America. The ice-house in which salmon used to be preserved is one of the many ruined buildings to be seen about the decaying houses of the gentry, and most country houses also had their fish ponds.

Among the common folk eels are esteemed only by the folk who catch them, legally or otherwise, but they were formerly

[1] A. E. J. Went, *J.R.S.A.I.*, 75 (1945), 213–23.
[2] A. E. J. Went, *J.R.S.A.I.*, 80 (1950), 146–54.